

Masthead Logo

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Now

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## VI

Now, day's last light dies in the pebbled yard,  
And the manic winds of March betray the season.  
We stop and listen. The bells, sound without reason,  
Summon the sailor seaward, the nun to prayer.  
Where there is time, time is its own reward.  
We say goodbye. I turn and go, but stay  
Fixed forever in your parting stare.  
Eastward, the darkness that the doves are bringing;  
But in the street, a boy prolongs his play,  
Now murmuring to himself, now softly singing.

### Now

You come over a hill, suddenly,  
late afternoon or early evening  
on 6A to Beach Point. Provincetown  
to Long Point Light, a yellow,  
dissolving Venice by Whistler  
or Monet. Bay flat. Silver  
grey. Dark blue further out.  
I'm not talking about the past.  
I'm talking about my sister,  
my wife, myself, — all of us  
travelling without reservations.  
I'm talking about three small  
sails tacked on the far horizon.  
At Shoreline Village, cabins  
1930's, sixty bucks a night  
and twenty yards from salt water,  
my sister talks about shells.  
Sister Whine. Sister Twinkle.  
Fifty years a nun this spring  
and all No to my Yes. A taste  
for dull food, and expensive  
Irish whiskey in her tea. Next

door, our neighbors play volley-  
ball without a net, their little  
girls shrieking like sea-birds.  
Danielle. Michelle. Julie.  
I'm not talking about childhood.  
I'm saying when the tide here  
goes out its long mile at dusk,  
the bay's a wet barnyard where  
a dozen boats strand and heel over,  
and clambers rake the golden muck  
for steamers. Later, the years  
come down slowly like stars  
on Mama's West Dennis or Harwich  
or wherever we summered the fall  
she died, hundreds of herring-fry  
shoaling and sparkling in a bright  
terror of shallows, my sister's  
beads clicking in the night. I'm  
not talking now about memory,  
but the way words leap backward  
to their beginnings, Wittgenstein's  
"significant silences," his desk  
drawer of posthumous phrases,  
words detached into mystery  
on little scraps of blue paper.  
So the clear argument of morning  
comes on, and lovers rise  
from their rented beds to lie  
in the sun. In Commercial Street,  
one man receives from another  
"the signature of God" in his hand.  
"What is it?" I ask my wife.  
A talisman? A smooth stone?  
A word from Hebrew cast in silver?  
I lay back on the sand of this  
rough prayer of a beach and close

my eyes on the four white ribs  
of the sky, listening to the low  
roll of surf say “jour,” “jour,”  
and sometimes “tousjours” to the shore.

The preceding poems are from *What I Think I Know: New & Selected Poems*, Another CHICAGO Press, 1991.

### AT BRIDGET’S WELL

The deep door of the sea  
slams shut against the shore;  
everything the body knows.  
And my wife counts off  
the counties—Leitrim, Long-  
ford, Roscommon, Galway,  
Clare—the way the God-ridden  
Irish count off beads.  
But she’s no fool of wisdom.  
Neither Irish, nor Catholic,  
nor stunned by centuries  
of Virgin-worship or plastic  
flasks tipped with waters  
of miracle. Pure tourist.  
Hard traveller.

That day,  
more than fifty years ago,  
when my Sister married God,  
she gave up all she had.  
It wasn’t much, I used  
to think. But I was wrong.  
It was everything. Now,  
in these narrow, too-sunlit  
lanes thorny with gorse,  
bruise-bright with fuchsias,